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Mitchell Backs Hoover's Right 'To Talk, Like Anybody Else'

By FRED P. GRAHAM
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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 — Attorney General John N. Mitchell said today that he found nothing improper in certain statements made recently by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

At a news conference at the Justice Department, Mr. Mitchell was repeatedly asked about published comments in which the 75-year-old bureau chief called former Attorney General Ramsey Clark a jellyfish, accused two imprisoned Roman Catholic priests of plotting to kidnap a White House aide, and said that Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans could not shoot straight but were dangerous with knives.

"Until he gets to the point, which he has not arrived at and I do not expect him to get to, where he is doing something that is improper within the confines of this department, he has a right to talk, just like anybody else," Mr. Mitchell said.

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Attorney General John N. Mitchell at news session.

Denies Rule Is Violated

He said that Mr. Hoover's charges against the Rev. Daniel Berrigan and his brother, the Rev. Philip F. Berrigan, did not violate a Justice Department rule against comment on pending investigations. Mr. Mitchell explained that this rule applied with greater force to attorneys than to the F.B.I.

Mr. Hoover was recently quoted in Time magazine as saying that there was no concern that Puerto Ricans or Mexicans would shoot the President "because they don't shoot very straight, but if they come at you with a knife, beware."

Mr. Mitchell declared that, in the context of Mr. Hoover's remarks, it could be seen that he was not "castigating or defaming any particular race, creed or anybody else."

"From where I sit, he's doing a mighty fine job," Mr. Mitchell concluded.

Steel Corporation Is Sued

He announced the filing today of a civil suit against the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation for allegedly discharging a substantial amount of cyanides and other pollutants into the Cuyahoga River near Cleveland. The Government has reports that the company's plant discharges more than 900 pounds of cyanides daily into the river. The suit seeks a court order prohibiting further discharges into the river.

Mr. Mitchell said that investigations were underway into similar complaints against United States Steel and Republic Steel. With the appointment of a former Assistant Attorney General, William D. Ruckelshaus, to head the Environmental Protection Agency, Mr. Mitchell predicted that the Justice Department's close ties with the Government's antipollution effort would produce "a new and stronger direction in antipollution litigation."

He announced the formation of a new pollution control section in the Justice Department's Lands Division. Initially, it will be composed of nine lawyers.

Plans 2-Week Holiday

In a 40-minute question-and-answer session held to clear away questions before his departure this weekend for a two-week vacation in Key Biscayne, Fla., the Attorney General dealt with a wide range of issues.

He said that all but 50 of the 2,700 school districts in the South have now switched from segregated to unitary school systems. Of the noncomplying 50, there are 16 under litigation by the Justice Department and 22 by private litigants, and the rest are in negotiations with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare or have adopted voluntary desegregation programs, he said.

No decision has been made as to whether a Federal grand jury investigation should be made into the shootings by National Guardsmen at Kent State University that left four students dead, the Attorney General disclosed.

"The criminal justice system in our country doesn't always work as fast as we might like," he said.

He added that, because state and Federal grand juries had looked into the shooting incident involving state policemen at Jackson State University in Mississippi and had issued no indictments, it would be "inappropriate" for the Justice Department to file charges in the form of informations that did not have a grand jury's backing. Two Negroes were killed in the shooting.

Meetings With Romney

Mr. Mitchell said that he had held three meetings with George Romney, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, in an effort to hammer out legal guidelines to be followed by regional offices of Mr. Romney's department in combating racial discrimination in suburban housing.

Asked about the Justice Department's lack of action on a recommendation by Mr. Romney's department for a suit against Blackjack, Mo., which has changed its zoning laws to block construction of low-cost housing, Mr. Mitchell said that the "total matter of the housing patterns in desegregation is under review." He added that he and his aides were "trying to find the Congressional intent in this broad area."